

Research & Issues in Music Education

Volume 10

Number 1 *Research & Issues in Music Education*, v.10,
2012

Article 6

2012

Spirituality and Synagogue Music: A Case Study of Two Synagogue Music Ensembles

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Shansky, Carol (2012) "Spirituality and Synagogue Music: A Case Study of Two Synagogue Music Ensembles," *Research & Issues in Music Education*: Vol. 10 : No. 1 , Article 6.

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Abstract

Participation in community music ensembles is an important and popular form of music education—with members of ensembles that perform within religious services having the opportunity of experiencing a possible extra dimension of a spiritual experience. Thus the intent of this study was to survey adult choir and band members at Temple Emeth in Teaneck, New Jersey, USA in terms of connections between music performance, educational experiences and spirituality. Thoughts and reflections of the participants as well as those of the clergy and choir director were gained through qualitative, open-ended interviews. Overall, it was found that participating in a synagogue musical ensemble, in addition to music education, lent itself to spiritual connection as well as providing the congregation with enhancement and education of the worship service. The results of this study were presented at the Spirituality and Music Education Conference in Birmingham, England in June 2010.

Introduction

In 2009 – 2010, I conducted a study of the adult choir (Kol Emet) and band (Temple Emeth Band) at Temple Emeth, a Reform synagogue in Teaneck, New Jersey, USA, in an effort to begin to understand what may be the spiritual connections and musical/religious educational experiences of those that participate in synagogue musical ensembles. This is an area that has not been researched in the music education field and very little is found in research on ensemble participation in synagogues. One obvious reason is the prohibition of such ensembles, especially instrumental, at Orthodox and most Conservative synagogues. But, they are increasingly prevalent in the Reform movement and this type of involvement on the part of congregants bears attention.

An aspect of community music, participation in a synagogue choir or band provides the same music education opportunities as do their counterparts in the secular world. The synagogue, or temple, is a community, bound by common religious and cultural beliefs and traditions. Choirs, especially, maintain the community's music as well as providing an outlet for musical expression and learning for its members. In addition, participation in a synagogue musical ensemble can offer the added layer of a spiritual connection that can be made through music making. Further, performing synagogue music affords the participant the opportunity to learn more about the liturgy and the service. This study provides an example of music/religious education and spirituality at a specific house of worship the results of which suggest important implications for research in religious school curriculum development, community music, and studies of spirituality.

Background

In the Reform movement, the cantor's role encompasses both prayer and song leader as the congregation is generally encouraged to sing along during the service. It is common for congregations to maintain a choir of volunteers that participate in some services and range in experience from almost professional to very amateur. The use of musical instruments was banned from use in the synagogue after the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in

c. 70 C.E in part because they suggest celebration. Shiloah tells us that, “Jews must forever mourn the destruction of the 2nd temple...” and “instrumental music is identified with pleasure and the secular world [the use of instruments] may copy the melodies and actions of non-Jews” (Shiloah, 1992, p. 86).

While the Orthodox and most Conservative denominations maintain this ban, the Reform movement has embraced the use of instruments, particularly the organ. Ironically, it was in an effort to be more like Christian worship that the organ was introduced to Reform worship practice. While organs appeared early in the development of the Reform service and the guitar as a product of the folk song movement of the 1960s, the regular use of other instruments have appeared more recently. Since 1985, there has been an increase in the appearance of musical instruments in synagogue services, accelerated by the advent of the “Friday Night Live” service, composed in 1998 by Craig Taubman as a service for young adults (ages 25 – 40) in an effort to draw them back to temple life (<http://www.judaism.com/gif-bk/99011b.gif>).

The Reform movement prides itself on adaptation, modernization and balance. As stated on The Union for Reform Judaism website, “The great contribution of Reform Judaism is that it has enabled the Jewish people to introduce innovation while preserving tradition” (<http://www.urj.org>). The re-appearance of instruments as part of the worship service is an important example of that.

The changes in the nature of how the music of the prayers is delivered in the service have also created a new role for music as a device to foster a sense of spirituality. Beyond serving as a means to chant required text, many congregants see the act of singing or listening to singing to be an integral part of their spiritual experience. In discussing the keen interest in singing as part of Reform worship services, composer and performer Debbie Friedman said that congregants are “‘hungry for it, really hungry’ for a sense of spiritual connectedness” (Cohen, 1996, p. 50).

The Study

The intent of this study was to discover aspects of spirituality experienced by members of the two aforementioned synagogue music ensembles through open-ended interviews. To that end, I asked what their perceived connections were while performing, what they understood their role to be during worship services and what intended or unintended educational experiences they were having. While the interviews were open-ended, I had a set of questions to serve as a basis for the discussions. Those interviewed were encouraged to elaborate or go “off-topic,” which often led to interesting revelations not only to me, but to the interview subject as well.

The study focused on those members of Kol Emet that participate year-round and did not consider those that join the choir to participate only in the High Holiday (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur) services. One participant in the Temple Emeth Band is the temple’s pianist, and as a paid, non-Jewish member of the temple staff, he was not included. No inquiries were made as to the participants’ perceptions of the musical quality of either ensemble and there was no skills assessment attempt made on my part. The congregation was not solicited for their perceptions, so the reporting of spirituality and the role of the ensembles is purposely one-sided. A survey of

the congregation was beyond the scope of this project, although the results of this investigation suggest such a study would offer further and valuable insight. To ensure privacy and recognizing the highly personal nature of the responses, quotes of ensemble members are given as anonymous.

I am a flutist and a member of the Temple Emeth Band; on occasion I play with the choir. Thus, I acknowledge my role as a participant-observer in this research project as well as the emic (account stemming from an observer within the culture) and etic (account stemming from an outside perspective) issues present during the interview process. In addition, I have previously served on the Board of Trustees of the temple and my spouse is an officer on the Executive Committee, therefore I am privy to some amount of information regarding governance of the temple.

Method

Data were collected via review of publications, document review, and interviews with ensemble members. The Temple Emeth Library is the primary source for documentary materials about the choir, which are primarily news clippings and announcements. Informational interviews were conducted with the Rabbi and Cantor of the temple. The director of the choir was interviewed both for information as well as her perspective as a former singer in the choir. Rehearsal and performance observations were conducted during the five-month study period.

An email (the ensembles' preferred method of communication) was sent informing all of the study and its intent as well as an announcement to Kol Emet by the director. Kol Emet members that preferred not to participate informed me of that and they were not solicited. An attempt was made to interview a range of ages, experience in music and time in the choir. The interviews were somewhat purposive. The choir members were selected based on years in the ensemble, with an attempt to capture the reflections of those with both long tenure and recent membership to achieve some balance. When data saturation set in, those that had not already been contacted for an interview were not solicited. All that requested an interview were met, however. Given the small size of the band, all volunteer members were interviewed and none preferred to be left out of the study. Some members asked to be interviewed, others were solicited. Qualitative, in-depth, and open-ended interviews with 12 of the 16 choir members and all of the band members (not counting this author) were conducted and took place at private homes, the library of the Temple and, in a few cases, restaurants, the objective in all cases to be for the convenience and comfort of the subject. One band member was interviewed in a casual, non-recorded setting. Each subject was interviewed individually and a digital recorder was used to minimize the distraction and delay inherent in note-taking on the part of the interviewer. The interviews were conducted according to the method of naturalist inquiry as described by Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen (1993). In this method, while there is an interview schedule, the interview itself is allowed to flow freely, enabling the subject to offer thoughts as they occur naturally or to elaborate on a given question resulting in information which might not have been revealed within a stricter scenario. The interviews were coded and the gathered

data triangulated to reveal common results. Several recurring themes emerged through the interview process. Those themes are discussed here.

Background in the Literature

Research specifically on participation in adult choirs in synagogues appears to be minimal. Bell (2000) investigated adult community choruses and Friedmann (2007) examined synagogue music. But attention to the musico-spiritual experience on the part of the membership of Jewish musical ensembles has not been investigated in the music research community. Brief attention is given by Friedmann and Stetson (2008) to the emergence and role of synagogue choirs as a part of Jewish worship services.

Participation in choral ensembles, particularly religious ones, appears to be popular. The 2009 *Chorus Impact Study* by Chorus America confirms that participation in choruses by adults is 18.1% nationally and that there are approximately 216,000 religious choirs; of the choir participants surveyed, 38% of Americans belong to volunteer religious choirs (p. 4 – 8). It should be noted, however, that the surveyed religious choirs were all church choirs (p. 25 – 26). One can assume that the participant survey number would increase with the addition of synagogue volunteer choirs. Bell (2004) interpreted the results of the 2003 *Chorus Impact Study* as they refer to community choruses and their activity.

In June 2010 the *Survey of Jewish Choral Activity in North America* was conducted by the Zamir Choral Foundation. The purpose of the survey was to discover the level of participation, demographics, and impact of synagogue choral activity (<http://www.zamirfdn.org>). The results of the survey of over 2,000 respondents align well with the results of this study, including areas regarding music education specific to Jewish worship, connections made between singing and sacred texts, sharing of a musical experience and the attainment of a spiritual experience, all of which received positive responses of over 60%.

Books on synagogue choirs do not seem to exist. Idelsohn (1992) provides the most comprehensive book on Jewish music, but choirs are only mentioned in the contexts of the background history of hazzanut and the changing compositional style of music for the Reform service. Rubin and Baron (2006), in their history of Jewish music, discuss the development of the volunteer choir and its eventual role of support for the cantor. Friedman points out that the introduction of synagogue choirs was part of the trend to adopt a more “church-like” component into the Reform service. He and Stetson also note that there was an imposition of “Western aesthetics,” including a more controlled performance of the music that led first to the introduction of choirs followed by the phenomenon of congregational singing. Singing in the synagogue was congregational singing now under the influence of the more dominant choral presence (2008, p. 25).

Jewish music and its transmission have been given in-depth study by Judah M. Cohen, Abraham Schwadron and Mark L. Kligman. Cohen (2009) presents the history and development and education of the cantorate, including and relevant to this study a discussion of

the Reform denomination's movement toward song-leading on the part of cantors. His examination of "place" (2008) in music traditions and transmission is a revealing look at music in the Reform summer camp tradition. The conclusions derived from that case study hold implications when considering music in the synagogue. In his comprehensive description of Jewish religious denominations and secular practices, musical and otherwise, Schwadron (1983) discusses the need for adaptation, a track taken by the Reform movement. While he does not discuss synagogue choirs or instrument use (except to mention the traditional ban on their use), the development of the music under study in this paper is in large part due to the adaptive nature of Reform Judaism. Schwadron (1970) reminds us that Jewish music is not easily defined as it is that of a diasporic people, therefore musical tradition and practice may vary widely. Kligman's research into Syrian Jewish practice (2003, 2008) reminds us of the critical importance of congregational participation in Jewish ritual practice. While Syrian Jewish worship is substantially different than American Reform style, his underscoring of the importance of the role of the hazzan (cantor) in leading ritual chanting is a connection between the two.

The need for Reform congregations to define themselves comes in part through the musical style employed. This emergence of the choir into greater prominence was not only due to the need for a more expanded art-aesthetic dimension, but was also a manifestation of a fundamental change in the very religious experience itself (Friedmann & Stetson, 2008).

The connection between singing, although not choral, and worship was investigated by Jeffrey Summit (2000), who studied the role of music in several congregations of different denominations. Issues of spiritual connection, worship style and musical choice were investigated. While adult synagogue choirs were not specifically included, many of his findings apply when considering the activity of singing in the choir and the possible spiritual connections made by its members. Summit points out that "[f]or many Jews, music and the choice of musical settings function as a basic, defining component of identity and affiliation" (p. 4). The ability to attain a spiritual connection may be a component in one's identification with one denomination or another.

The topic of spirituality and music has been investigated by those in the field of music therapy. Lipe (2002) and Aldridge (1995) look at this intersection and its relationship and role in music therapy. A sense of spirituality achieved through music listening provides transcendence and hope, creating an avenue of comfort. Those dealing with end-of-life issues are demonstrated to benefit from music therapy, in particular because of music's perceived generation of spiritual effects. Lowis and Hughes (1997) attempted to prove an inherent spirituality contained in music but were unable to definitively do so. The results of their quantitative tests conducted on retired persons did demonstrate that people who state that they consider some music to be spiritual may be "spiritually-minded" themselves, and a significant amount expressed feelings of calm, pleasantness or experienced "nice images." This suggests an important role for music in music therapy and, while an inherent spiritual characteristic may not have been proven to exist in music, there is some kind of similar reaction on the part of inclined listeners. Self-identity, interpersonal connections, well-being, motivation and spirituality were among the results of a qualitative study conducted by Hays and Minichiello

(2005) on how music functions in the lives of older people. Both ensembles under investigation are populated by adult congregants, many of whom, especially in the choir, are in their retirement years.

St. Vincent (2011) compiled over 100 responses from a wide variety of musicians in regards to their perception of spirituality as a part of music making, listening and engagement. While not a scholarly book, it does provide a direct response to the question of spirituality and music. It should be noted that those interviewed for this book represented an equally wide variation of religious philosophy and perspective. The overwhelming response from these musicians is that music provides, for them, a spiritual connection, a feeling of transcendence, and in some cases connection to a higher power.

The presence of spirituality in music or the ability for music to generate a spiritual event for the practitioner is examined by Palmer (1995) in a broad sense and to encourage music educators and researchers to consider this under-considered aspect of music. Spirituality is not restricted to Jewish or Christian music, but is considered an integral, almost impossible-to-define component of Japanese belief as discussed by Matsunobu (2007). Boyce-Tillman (2007) suggests a guide for developing a framework by which to evaluate whether a particular piece of music is spiritual or whether the listener is apt to have a spiritual experience by hearing it. She makes particular mention of a practical application of such a framework when considering music education.

[The Musical Activities at Temple Emeth](#)

Temple Emeth is a Reform Jewish congregation located in Teaneck, New Jersey (pop. 39,000)—a town situated approximately seven miles west of New York City. With approximately 350 member families, it is considered a medium-sized congregation. The building is modern as is the sanctuary where both ensembles rehearse and perform. Typical for most synagogues, there is a raised area (bima) upon which stands the clergy (each at a lectern) and most recently, the band during the music service. There is a choir area (called “the pit” although it is not below ground level) where the choir rehearses and performs. The congregation sits in rows of cushioned seats facing the bima and looking straight ahead at the ark which contains several Torahs. The ark doors are a work of art as well, covered with a weaving commission for the temple.

Temple Emeth is often described by those in the congregation, and confirmed by the synagogue’s cantor, Ellen Tilem, to be a “singing congregation” (personal interview, February 9, 2010) meaning that the congregation as a whole sings willingly during services and seems to particularly enjoy the musical component of worship. The music performed by Kol Emet and the Temple Emeth Band is liturgical, ranging from formally composed music to camp songs. Temple Emeth has a children’s choir, Etz Chaim, for grades 1 through 7, a teen choir, Shir Chadash, and the two subjects of the study: the adult volunteer choir Kol Emet and the Temple Emeth Band. In addition to the keyboard that accompanies the Cantor at all services, guitar is often used as an accompanying instrument at family-oriented services and Bar or Bat Mitzvahs.

Kol Emet

“Kol Emet” (literally “voice of truth”) is a recent name for the choir (in use for approximately seven years) and it was simply known as the Adult Choir for most of its history. The choir was founded in 1954 by a temple member and it has been led either by a lay leader (non-clergy) or cantor. The current choir director, Jacqueline Guttman, is a lay leader who is trained as a choral and instrumental music director. Kol Emet sings at several Shabbat services a year and some special occasions, and is an institution at the High Holiday services. There is no audition to join the ensemble and the core group numbers sixteen, although it will swell to over twenty for the High Holiday services with the addition of members that sing only for those services. Both the Cantor and the director acknowledge that the core ensemble is a sizable group for a volunteer temple choir.

During the liturgical year the choir rehearses on a weekly basis and works on music that is composed for choir as opposed to singing only from song sheets. Rehearsals take place in the sanctuary of Temple Emeth, in the area that the choir occupies during services. The rehearsals are conducted in the traditional manner; after a vocal warm-up, the choir works through a given piece conducted by the director after which the director points out important elements, explains what needs improvement, often demonstrating by singing, and explains the place of the piece in the service. Careful attention is paid to vocal technique and it is clear that the rehearsal does not represent a “run-through” of each piece, but a careful approach to preparation and learning.

In addition to Shabbat services and special events at the Temple, the choir often participates in the Union for Reform Judaism Annual Choir Festival that attracts choirs from Central to Northern New Jersey and on average there are ten to twelve choirs participating. In May 2010 the choir performed a special concert at the Temple, celebrating twelve years of directorship by Jacqueline Guttman.

The Temple Emeth Band

The Temple Emeth Band was formed in 2001 as a result of the institution of a monthly “Music Service.” While singing and chanting is an essential element of Jewish worship, especially at Temple Emeth, the Rabbi at that time, Arturo Kalfus, sought to introduce a new style of service modeled after one that had been successfully running at a Conservative congregation in New York City. That service featured non-stop music, and congregants were encouraged to dance and participate with instruments, a format generally unfamiliar to traditional worship practice. Worship services in the Reform movement have long utilized organ, piano and guitar, and the service instituted at Temple Emeth would represent an expansion of the role and presence of music. The band plays (in different configurations) on all songs, and congregants are encouraged to sing and dance. It is a departure from the typical service in that there is no reading from the Torah, the Rabbi does not give a sermon, and a greater musical interaction is obvious. Not long after the institution (and success) of this service, a fixed ensemble became the regularly occurring performance group.

The ensemble members, a mix of professionally trained and amateur, were recruited by the Cantor based on her knowledge of their musical abilities. Two members requested to join the band after the establishment of the music service, but beyond that there is no means for new participants to join. The group is made up of violin, flute, conga drum and percussion, melodica, keyboard, bass and guitars. Not all instruments play on all songs, so there are a variety of sounds and timbres as a result. Additionally, not all band members are able to perform at each service. They are not replaced by substitutes so at any given music service the music may take on a different character. In contrast to the choir, band rehearsals are ad hoc, approximately once a year, the objective being to learn new music and work on issues in the existing repertoire. Occasionally there will be a rehearsal during the liturgical year but there is no defined schedule. The rehearsals do not run via the guidance of a director. The Cantor makes her musical needs known and the group works as a collective. Occasionally I will make suggestions related to voicing or ensemble issues, but it is otherwise not an autocratically run band.

Generally the music used is not composed for the ensemble and they rely on lead sheets, although I have composed some original pieces and created some arrangements for the instrumentation as has as another temple member. While each instrument is assigned a “part,” this is a loose concept and there is much improvisation. The monthly service does not habitually include Kol Emet although they do collaborate with the band on one or two services a year or for special occasions.

“It’s How I Pray”

Several consistent themes emerged from the qualitative interviews conducted for this project. While they may not apply to each subject interviewed, the results of the data collection reveal that a majority expressed them. These overarching themes were:

- Kol Emet and the Temple Emeth Band each serve to enhance the service and worship experience for the congregants.
- Participation in these groups often facilitates a sense of spirituality or worship for its members.
- Participation is due in part to the general enjoyment of making music.
- Participation in the band or Kol Emet is a learning experience, especially in terms of Jewish music.
- Participation is a community activity both within the group (Kol Emet) and for Temple Emeth in general.
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What stood out particularly was that the answers from the choir members were much more uniform than those of the band members. There are several possible reasons for this: 1) the choir is led by a conductor, so the direction is more traditional and authoritarian where the band is a collective with musical decisions made in part by the Cantor and in part by the group, 2) there are more formally trained or experienced musicians in the band and their perceptions

of the role of music may be influenced, perhaps even jaded by, prior experiences and knowledge, 3) lacking words, the impact of the prayer for instrumentalists may not be as strongly felt. This is supported by Ross when she said “[a]s singing is mostly linked to a text, it is not only suited to the expression of a specific idea, it moreover has the special capability to convey words a heightened significance that these do not have when merely spoken” (2007, p. 3). The lack of cohesion in the responses from the band members was, ironically, rather uniform.

The Perceived Role of the Ensembles

It was clear from the interviews that the perception on the part of the participants in these ensembles is that the music they perform serves to enhance the service for the congregation. A variety of descriptions were offered such as “facilitate,” “make easy,” “provide a distraction.” One subject, in discussing the choir singing the powerful Kol Nidre prayer said, “being in the choir box and looking out, you see something that’s absolutely remarkable and it hits you...what you see is that genetic/DNA reaction to these melodies...what you start to see is people crying” (personal interview, December 2, 2009).

One area of uniformity was that the choir and band members did not view their music making as a performance in the manner of an event that an audience quietly listens to. Many registered concern that it might be perceived that way by congregants and therefore obstruct participation. It appeared of great importance to all interviewed that the congregation sees the ensembles as guides or means of entry to musical participation in the service. As one subject observed,

Certainly when we perform at a service it feels like worship and it feels really nice that there’s this connection that I feel, and that I think we feel as a group, to the congregation and they’re happy and they’re smiling because we’re singing some song that they’re familiar with and they’re into it and we’re doing a nice job and there’s that energy that happens (personal interview, February 21, 2010).

The observation that congregants joined in singing or, in the case of the music service, get up and dance appeared to bring a great deal of satisfaction to the musicians. This was particularly acute for the members of the band. There is a strong sense of interaction between the music of the band and the response of the congregants in attendance. The service is thought to be a more successful one when there is a higher level of congregational participation. The connection between the choir and the congregation was noted by Cantor Tilem as she defined the role of Kol Emet to “raise the musical and spiritual intelligence of the congregation” (personal interview, February 9, 2010).

While it was noted by a few that their participation represented a form of “work,” they understood that to be in the form of providing a service to the congregants; this sense of “work” can, however, have an impact on the individual musician’s own response to the worship experience.

Music/Religious Education

Participation in these ensembles as a form of music education was viewed differently by band members and choir members. Without knowledge of the characteristics of informal learning, most of the band members' perception of music education is that it is intentional and teacher-directed. It was notable that until the concept of informal learning was discussed in the interview, music education as a participatory aspect was mostly denied, except by two subjects. This was particularly true for those with formal music school training or substantial performance experience. Once lifelong/informal learning concepts were explained and discussed, the idea that participation in the Temple Emeth Band is a form of music education was grudgingly accepted. There appeared to be significant resistance to the idea that this activity represented a learning opportunity. However, learning Jewish melodies, increased confidence in improvisation and performance were aspects of music education that were acknowledged.

By contrast, most of the choir members acknowledged their participation as in part music and/or religious education. Many directed their comments to vocal education and music literacy via the director, others mentioned that they have learned new Jewish music, come to a greater understanding of Jewish liturgy or the Jewish worship process in general.

An understanding of the Jewish worship service and its liturgy was an area of education that many of the subjects pointed to. One subject remarked, "I've grown some in my knowledge of Judaism. That you can't take away. I therefore know Jewish music better, I like it..." (personal interview, January 20, 2010).

While the thoughts of the congregation were not solicited for this report, Cantor Tilem suggested that it is through the singing of the choir that many of the congregants are exposed to and learn much of the new music that is emerging from the Reform movement.

Participation in Music Activities

Although the focus of this project was to discover what spiritual connections are made through synagogue music participation, the enjoyment of making music as an attribute of this activity cannot be ignored.

All of those interviewed expressed a love of singing or playing their instrument. A major given reason for joining Kol Emet was a positive experience with choral singing in high school or college. The enjoyment derived from playing one's instrument was also given by the band members.

A sense of community, both of the ensemble and the synagogue, is a part of the enjoyment factor. Both groups expressed a sense of community about their respective ensembles. For the choir members, it seemed that the opportunity to sing with others was of great importance. This was an element of the band members' responses, but expanded to include the participation and response from the congregation. In addition, interview subjects from both ensembles

acknowledged a sense of community about the ensembles themselves, the choir being the more cohesive in this aspect.

Spirituality

John P. Miller defined spirituality as, "... not confined to institutional religion but is concerned with the connection we can feel between ourselves and something vast, unseen, mysterious, and wondrous" (2000, p. 140). Rabbi Steven Sirbu, spiritual leader of Temple Emeth, explained that spirituality is "what is meaningful to the individual" (personal interview, January 26, 2010). It is with these definitions in mind that the question of spiritual connection through ensemble participation was pursued with the members of Kol Emet and the Temple Emeth Band.

The subject of spirituality proved a difficult one for the members interviewed. One issue seemed to be the word itself; its meaning and highly personal nature. The reactions to the question of whether there was felt some kind of spiritual connection when participating in the band or choir were immediate and often passionate, but not uniform. Similar to the question about music education, there appeared to be a difference in response if the subject was a choir member or band member. Again, the choir members were more uniform in their responses and the band members much less so.

Within the band this split seemed to again occur along the formally trained/experienced vs. untrained/less experienced lines. Those with more formal training were less likely to acknowledge a spiritual sensation, but did point out features of the experience that could be identified as spiritual. It should be noted, however, that those features appeared to be present at other musically satisfying experiences as well, giving rise to the thought that the more trained and seasoned musician experiences some kind of spirituality by the action of music making and not by the connection to a religious rite. Anthony Palmer, in discussing the power of music and the self said, "music holds some special capabilities to lift us toward a higher self" (1995, p. 98).

There may be two reasons for the difficulty in making a spiritual connection:

1. As instrumentalists, the band members don't sing the words of the prayers thereby detaching them from the meaning of the prayer.
2. The issue of playing as "work," as discussed earlier. When the music service is going well, and therefore seems less like work, there is a heightened spiritual connection, albeit ill-defined. When prompted on this, one of the subjects stated that when it seemed less like work, they are more able to relax and gain a personal feeling or connection while performing.

There was some acknowledgement of a special "feeling" when it came to playing at the temple, perhaps due to the presence of the temple "family." One subject, who is professionally trained, explained that, "it's like coming home to my family and getting to play music. It's nice to be surrounded by family and friends and make music" (personal interview, March 3, 2010). This connection or feeling of "being moved" by music occurs outside of the synagogue as well, although it was noted that there is something special about performing at the temple. As a

participant-observer, I concur that while I feel this “connection” when performing music generally, I note a unique sensation when performing as part of a worship service at Temple Emeth.

The choir members were not as uniform in their responses here as they were with the role of the choir at the synagogue, but a high number of them (eight of the twelve interviewed) felt strongly that their choir participation represented a form of worship or spirituality. Those that responded in the affirmative did so quite emphatically. In some cases, the sense of “connection,” being “uplifted,” the music having “meaning” was a central reason for participation in Kol Emet. One subject commented, “The music is very transporting. You go to another place...I find myself in a very glorious place inside” (personal interview, December 4, 2010). This sentiment is not uncommon in Jewish musical experiences, as indicated by Ross who states that, “music has always been an integral part of religious experience, and thus, is described as transcendental” (2007, p. 1).

Not understanding the specific words of Hebrew did not seem to cause an issue, but having an understanding of the prayer and its place in the service was a component of the spiritual experience. Several choir members reported that an important element of participation in Kol Emet was to better learn the order of the service and meaning of the prayers.

One cannot ignore, however, the possibility that this spiritual sensation is caused by the group music making more than any particular prayer. Most of the members of Kol Emet do not participate in any other musical ensemble, so this is their singular opportunity to involve themselves in group singing. However, even those singers that work with other groups found the experience of singing in Kol Emet a spiritual one. This may be due to two factors: 1) they are singing at their own synagogue and the community connection may contribute to the overall spiritual sense and 2) the other groups may not be religious in orientation and the experience is therefore missing that component.

Conclusion

Cantor Tilem spoke of the “feel of the service and the music” when discussing the sense of spirituality during the music service. Rabbi Sirbu pointed out the impact on the words by the music as, “mak[ing] the words of prayer uplifting and spiritual...[we] experience the words in a beautiful way.” This unidentifiable “feeling” or “experience” is best categorized as spirituality or spiritual connection that occurs by virtue of engaging in a religious service that is supported by music.

Obviously all of those interviewed had their own unique perspectives and responses to my questions. But the passion with which they answered the question about spirituality leads me to conclude that participation in Kol Emet or the Temple Emeth Band does represent an opportunity for spiritual connections through music in a religious setting at the same time that personal music development is taking place. At minimum, their participation leads to further education about the worship service thereby creating the atmosphere for spirituality. It is clear

that cultural and religious education is a component of musical participation and for some participants has represented the sole means of obtaining that education. For those for whom there is no *conscious* connection, the role of the ensemble to enhance the service and serve as leader for prayer is of primary importance to its members and suggests that the presence of one or both of these ensembles may serve as a conduit for spirituality on the part of the congregation.

Seeking a meaning through music may be part of the overall search for a Jewish identity, and music's important role in the service is likely a part of this search. Tisdell and Tolliver point out that, "part of this ongoing reclaiming of cultural identity and production of new knowledge can be expressed through music..." (2001, p. 14). This was the case for some Kol Emet members who joined the choir as part of an effort to reconnect with Judaism. Thomas G. Long writes:

Part of the joy of worship is to know the motions, know the words, know the song. The vital congregations knew their order of worship and moved through it with deep familiarity. What is more, the worshippers had active roles – speaking, singing, moving – and many of these they could perform from memory (in Frishman, 2007, p. x).

Long is reflecting on past practice, suggesting that much of what had been common practice has, to some degree, been lost. It seems that through the activities of temple choirs and synagogue instrumental ensembles, those past practices can be re-learned, revitalized and once again, congregants can experience their own sense of spirituality.

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